NORTHERN 'IRAQ AND ITS PEOPLES

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The CHAIRMAN: Ladies and Gentlemen,—I have much pleasure in introducing Major Wilson, who is going to speak to us on the subject of Northern 'Iraq and its peoples. He first served in 'Iraq under that very great officer, Sir Percy Cox, who recently passed away. Major Wilson rebuilt Kut after our victory over the Turks, and of recent years he has been administrative officer at Mosul; and can give us very up-to-date accounts of the Assyrian problem in Northern 'Iraq, and can also speak from first-hand knowledge of the Kurds and the other minorities of the country.

TO many who have never been to 'Iraq, the name, or its old alternative, Mesopotamia, possibly conjures up visions of flat, featureless plains, strips of cultivation along the banks of the two great rivers, Tigris and Euphrates, sandstorms and a torrid climate. Such visions are in a fair measure true of central and southern 'Iraq, but are very far from applying to the two northern provinces of Arbil and Mosul.

Geography

From the Lesser Zab river northwards the country is undulating and intersected with watercourses or wādis, which after rain flow down to the Tigris and its half-dozen tributaries. This type of country extends right up to the foothills which fringe the mighty mountain mass of Kurdistan. Over this area, irrigation, except on the rivers for summer crops, is unnecessary, and the rainfall which comes between November and May is in most years sufficient for the cultivation of large crops of wheat and barley. In the spring, grazing for animals is plentiful and a wonderful assortment of wild flowers appear.

In the mountains, during the same period, heavy rain and snow fill the underground sources and provide water for the summer growing of rice, tobacco and other crops, and for good summer grazing for animals. These mountains contain several ranges 6,000 to 8,000 feet high and one peak near the Iranian frontier over 10,000 feet.

Population

The inhabitants of the two provinces consist of an extraordinarily heterogeneous collection of creeds and races with all the problems produced by such a collection.

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1 The population of Mosul and Arbil provinces exceeds 630,000, of
162 which 530,000 are Muslims. Of these Muslims, all but 10,000 are Sunnis. There are 60,000 Christians, 32,000 Yezidis and 10,000 Jews. The minorities therefore total only one-fifth of the whole. The Muslims consist of Arabs and Kurds in approximately equal parts, together with some 16,000 Turkomans.

I Mosul itself is mainly an Arab town with a population of 100,000.
[162] It is a great entrepôt for trade in sheep, cattle, wool, grain, hides,
438 intestines, galls and eggs with the thickly populated districts round
439 and also with Syria and Turkey. Its importance in this respect will
496 certainly increase when at long last it is linked by rail with the Syrian frontier at Tel Kuchik and with Baghdad via Baa'iji. Work on this linking is now proceeding, and it is interesting to remember that when it is completed in a couple of years it will form the last stage in the famous Baghdad-Berlin Railway which was the Kaiser's fondest dream. The circumstances under which it will be completed are likely, however, to be very different to those which he visualized.

Arabs

•I Apart from forming the majority of the inhabitants of Mosul itself,
B Arabs are found as cultivators on the Tigris both north and south of
101 the town and to the south of the Jebal Sinjar (Sinjar mountain) and as bedouin who range the uncultivated areas to the south-west, west and north-west.

B The bedouin consist of more than one tribe, but by far the most
619 important is the Shammar. This great tribe is of Arabian origin and
221 has in the past been pushed steadily northwards by economic forces
721 and the search for new grazing grounds. With the great improve-
233 ment in public security during recent years, cultivation has extended further and further from the towns and villages and encroached on the haunts of the Shammar. Formerly the means of livelihood of these bedouin were varied if not all respectable. They included the raiding of the flocks and herds of their weaker neighbours and the extortion of "khuwa" or safe-conduct money from merchants, travellers and others. At the same time they made a perfectly legitimate living from acting as shepherds for the flocks of townsmen and by breeding and selling camels. Nowadays raiding and safe-conduct money have been abolished and motor transport has to a great extent ousted the camel as a carrier in 'Iraq and the neighbouring countries and caused a severe slump in the camel market.

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PREFACE

000 IN Victorian days it was customary to preface a translated work with an apology for imperfections in the translation. I would say that I am not an interpreter such as those of the United Nations, who can listen to a long speech in one language and who afterwards can render it accurately and with perfect memory in another language. I am also conscious that these stories when told with a wealth of gesture and expression of face and voice were things of vivid beauty like rare butterflies, and in reducing them to paper it is as if they have been killed and pinned in a collector's cabinet.

• 101 361 233 These stories belong to the great Shia tribes of Southern Iraq. I first came into contact with these tribes when, coming over from the Western Desert in the winter of 1942, I halted on the road near Ur, and engaged a couple of likely-looking tribesmen to show me what local shooting there was, and to act as guides. The next day we drove far into the desert after bustard, and coming over a rise in the ground we saw before us a group of long, low, black tents; in my ignorance I turned to my two guides and asked them what the tribe of these bedouin was. Their faces registered horror and surprise, and they said: 'Those are not bedouin; they are Arabs.' Not having been previously aware of this distinction, I asked them how they told the difference between bedouin and Arab. They replied: 'We thought because you speak Arabic you

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would know the difference.' They went on to point out large numbers of sheep dotted around the horizon and they explained that had there been a large number of camels with a few sheep, then bedouin would have been indicated. Instead there was a large number of sheep with a few camels, indicating Arabs. They had to go on to explain that by Arabs they meant the great landowning Shia tribes, who are in the main cultivators of rice, dates, barley and a variety of other crops, but they send out their sheep on long treks through the desert in charge of some of their families in search of grass.

Most of the Arab tribes are dwellers in houses or clean, cool huts made of reed matting, which allows for a constant current of air through the hut, and prevents the temperature from rising to that of an oven in the hot sun, like a house. Many of these stories were told in a large guest house or tent pitched amongst the houses, with a background of sound varying from that of the cooking of a meal of several roast sheep to the powerful thump, thump, thump, of the great pumps. These pumps deserve mention, since they are often a tribe's principal pride and source of wealth. At one place I was surprised to hear that a boy's name was Rustam, since this name is more common amongst Persians and Kurds than amongst Arabs, but it was explained to me that he was named after the pump, and I understood when I saw the name Rustom stamped on an iron plate on the great cylinder.

The Arab tribes have a great military history of which they are justly proud. It is long and somewhat complicated, and to give in full the history of a single tribe as told by the sheikhs would fill a book greater in size than this. I will, however, give a précis of the history of that great group of tribes which were known as the Muntafiq.

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deck cargo, and the goods would be liable to damage by rain or spray if otherwise packed.

13. THE STORY OF SHEIKH MIZHIL EL QURNACHI, A MAN OF A NOBLE FAMILY, THOUGH HIS LAND WAS POOR

Page 185, Line 15. 'and ordered fifty mithkals of them.'
The mithkal is a small weight used by goldsmiths.

Page 188, Line 20. 'Take soldiers and go to Qasr Qurnachi.'
Qasr—castle. 'Qurnachi Castle.'

Page 191, Line 11. 'Can then the hawk fly without wings.'
I was told that this quotation was from a famous Arab poet, but regret that I was unable to place it, and nobody could remember the name of the poet. The quotation as put into the mouth of Sheikh Aqab is particularly apt, as Aqab, though its literal translation is 'eagle,' is a name often given to hawks.

Page 198, Line 24. 'She was clad in an ataq and bag trousers.'
The ataq is a kind of blouse.

14. THE STORY OF DAOUD THE CAMEL AND OF HIS MISFORTUNES

Page 204, Line 4. 'The Shammar of the Jezira.'
The area in Mosul Liwa which lies to the west of the Tigris, that is, between the Tigris and the Euphrates, is known as the Jezira, or Island. The Shammar in this area are the famous tribe of the late Sheikh Ajil el Yawar.

15. BETWEEN TRUTH AND FALSEHOOD LIE FOUR FINGERS

Page 214, Line 14. 'The name of this girl was Leila for she was born in the night.'
Leila, 'Night,' is a popular girl's name in South Iraq. I do not think it is restricted only to those girls born at night.

5: Harrison D-4 (1912-1924) 1924 M1 Middle East
Iraq MH1

CHAPTER VI

THE ARABS OF MESOPOTAMIA

MESOPOTAMIA does not belong to Arabia geographically. It lies to the north of the peninsula and includes the territory between the mountains of Asia Minor on the north, the mountains of Persia on the east, the Syrian desert on the west and the Persian Gulf on the south. The area enclosed between these limits is enormous. These are its natural boundaries, but politically the territory included takes in certain districts that belong to Persia and Turkey as well as the kingdom of Mesopotamia. It is of interest to include Mesopotamia in any discussion of Arab life, for although the Mesopotamians are not in Arabia geographically, nor even politically, racially they are Arabs as truly as the inhabitants of Nejd or the dwellers in the valleys of Oman. Practically all of the inhabitants of Mesopotamia are Arabic speaking and Arabic in origin, the chief exceptions being the numerous Jews who have come into the country from the north and the small community of Sabaeans, or fire-worshippers, who are a remnant of the people that the Arabs found inhabiting the country. The Arab is the dominant element, and the others together would probably not amount to five per cent of the whole.

The character of the country is most easily understood if we start by saying that Mesopotamia is the enormous

5: Harrison D-4 (1912-1924) 1924 M1 Middle East
Iraq MH1
Turkish Period M2

with, but even the admittedly great difficulties of her task do not excuse her utter failure. Although she has had hundreds of years of opportunity to exert her abilities in harmonizing the different races which make up her population, they are now more discordant than ever, and we had during the war the hideous spectacle of the dominant race deliberately attempting to exterminate one of the insubordinate subject races in cold blood, certainly a sufficient confession of failure.

The Sabaeans or fire-worshippers of Mesopotamia furnish a notable example of Turkish ineptitude in facing this difficult problem of assimilating alien races. The Sabaeans are the remnants of the pre-Islamic population of Mesopotamia who refused to become Moslems in the days of the Moslem conquest. They have been, and so far as their diminished numbers permit they still are, a most valuable asset to the country. They are by far the best artisans in the Arab world. Some of their silver work surpasses the best that India can offer. This community, which is absolutely peaceable and knows nothing of the arts of war, has been harried and persecuted until now there remains only the smallest fraction of their original numbers. They now number less than ten thousand, if their own estimates can be trusted, and their complete disappearance is apparently a matter of only a short time.

Another indictment that must be brought against the Turk in the Arab world is the fact that he failed utterly as a civilizing force. This was his fault and not simply his misfortune, as might be argued of an Arab ruler who has never seen the vision of the government as a force working to uplift society. In Hasa sanitation was not improved even in the most elementary way. No